



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Shigellosis

(bacillary dysentery)

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a highly contagious infection of the gut caused by *Shigella* bacteria. Most cases of shigellosis occur in children 1 to 4 years old. So shigellosis is an important cause of illness in childcare centers in the United States. *Shigella* could also be used as a bioterrorist weapon.

How do you get it?

You get shigellosis by eating or drinking food or water contaminated with feces contaminated with *Shigella*. The most common mode of transmission is person-to-person spread from a case or carrier. A very small dose of *Shigella* is needed to cause illness. Conditions of crowding, poor hygiene, and failure to wash the hands after using the toilet are major factors in the spread of the disease. Flies can spread the disease by landing in contaminated feces and then on food. Shigellosis is not transmitted by coughing or sneezing.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

The symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, watery diarrhea, and occasionally, traces of blood in the feces. The symptoms can range from mild to severe; some infected individuals may not have any signs of illness.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days following infection with the bacteria, but the onset may occur in as few as 12 hours or as many as 7 days.

Should a person with shigellosis stay home from school or work?

Yes. Food handlers, day care workers, and health care workers should not return to work until they have their doctor's permission.

What is the treatment for shigellosis?

Fluid and electrolyte replacement is most important. Most persons with shigellosis will recover without treatment. However, a doctor can prescribe medicine to treat severe cases of the disease. In general, anti-diarrhea medications are not recommended because they may prolong the illness.

How can you keep from getting it?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing diapers. Wash your hands and the child's hands after changing diapers.

Wash your hands thoroughly before preparing or serving food and before eating or feeding children.

Dispose of soiled diapers and other fecal material in a sanitary manner.

Avoid sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission.

Keep flies from contaminating food.

For more information, see the CDC's website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/shigellosis_g.htm